FBI RECORDS FAIL TO SUPPORT EX-AGENT'S CLAIM ABOUT RAY EVIDENCE
Scripps Howard News Service
Release date: 03-25-98
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MEMPHIS, Tenn. — FBI records fail to support a former agent's claim that he found evidence in James Earl Ray's car in 1968 indicating Ray was framed for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination.

Former FBI agent Donald Wilson met with prosecutors Tuesday in Atlanta, where he told reporters he found two slips of paper in Ray's car listing names and dollar amounts supposedly related to a conspiracy.

Wilson, who says he was one of two agents who impounded Ray's car in Atlanta days after the assassination, said he kept the documents and didn't disclose them to supervisors because he didn't trust them.

"That's laughable," said retired FBI agent Jack Beverstein, 73, who helped search Ray's abandoned white Ford Mustang in Atlanta seven days after King was shot April 4, 1968, in Memphis.

FBI reports examined Tuesday by The Commercial Appeal show that Beverstein and four other agents participated in the April 11, 1968, search of Ray's car.

Wilson is not mentioned in reports documenting the discovery, impoundment or search of Ray's car.

"There was no Don Wilson that I heard of," said retired agent Carl Claiborne, 81, who headed the search of Ray's car.

FBI reports show that special agent James Joseph Dolan accompanied a Reid's Body Shop wrecker that towed the abandoned Mustang from a parking lot at Atlanta's Capitol Homes public housing development. The car was taken to the FBI garage in downtown Atlanta, where it was examined by agents Beverstein, Claiborne, Jack Simpson, Richard Davis and Alden Miller.

Claiborne said Tuesday from his Knoxville, Tenn., home that the examination occurred over five hours in a locked basement and that only he and Miller inspected the car's interior and trunk. He distinctly remembered each of the other agents named in the report. Claiborne and Beverstein, of Valdosta, Ga., had no recollection of Wilson.

Evidence from the car — hair specimens, fibers, clothing, bed linens and soil scrapings from below the car —was delivered by agents Miller and Simpson the day after the examination to the FBI's crime lab in Washington, reports show.

Unrelated to the car search, FBI reports show that agent Donald G. Wilson helped examine copies of money orders cashed in Atlanta on April 11 and 12, 1968, in an effort to locate King's assassin.

Ray, 70, pleaded guilty to King's murder in 1969 but claims he was coerced and framed. Serving a 99-year sentence, Ray has a terminal liver disease and is seeking release through trial or medical furlough.

Wilson, accompanied Tuesday in Atlanta by Ray lawyer William Pepper, met with Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard, who said he lacked the resources and time to investigate, but plans to share the information with U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno.

Wilson said he has two slips of paper locked in a vault near his Chicago-area home that he took from Ray's Mustang when it was impounded in Atlanta.

One slip lists names, locations and figures that appear to be dollar amounts, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution said Tuesday, announcing Wilson's claims and the pending meeting with Howard. The slip also lists a name that appears to be "Raul," the newspaper reported.

Ray has long contended he was framed by a mysterious figure he knew only as "Raoul."

The Atlanta newspaper also said the slips list a phone number that "appears to refer to Jack Ruby," who was convicted of killing Lee Harvey Oswald, the suspected assassin of President John Kennedy in 1963.

"I'm here only on behalf of the King family," Wilson told reporters.

(Marc Perrusquia is a reporter for The Commercial Appeal in Memphis.)